

# AMERICAN CONSULAR SERVICE

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## ARTICLE ON THE AMERICAN CONSULAR SERVICE AND COMMERCIAL ATTACHÉS

By  
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PRESENTED BY MR. STERLING

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REPORTED BY MR. CHILTON.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,  
*July 9, 1914.*

*Resolved*, That the manuscript submitted by Mr. Sterling on March fifth, nineteen hundred and fourteen, entitled "The American Consular Service and Commercial Attachés," by Mr. J. J. Slechta, of New York, be printed as a Senate document.

Attest:

JAMES M. BAKER, *Secretary.*

## THE AMERICAN CONSULAR SERVICE AND COMMERCIAL ATTACHÉS.

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Those who favor the appointment of commercial attachés to serve the United States in foreign countries, as provided for in House bill 13302, have made frequent reference to the practice of Germany, England, and Austria-Hungary in this particular. The following comments are made with a view to briefly stating the objections to such an expenditure of public funds. The writer proposes at the outset to demonstrate to the members of both Houses of Congress that an expenditure of an amount equal to that which will be involved in maintaining commercial attachés in 14 different posts would be sufficient to practically double the efficiency of the whole American Consular Service in all that pertains to the activity of consular officers in commercial affairs. But before entering upon that phase of the question, it should be noted that in the case of commercial attachés appointed by Germany and other countries, such officials are made virtually subordinates of the consuls general. To be sure, the commercial attaché is free to come and go more or less as he pleases in carrying on his investigation in the territory assigned to him, but he must report to his Government through the consul general and he receives his instructions through that official. He has his office in the quarters occupied by the consulate and may be assigned by the consul general to any duty within his sphere. In most cases the commercial attaché has the assistance of a member of the consular staff and is in all important respects himself a member of the staff, assigned to a definite field. His salary is usually about one-half that received by the consul general.

It would seem expedient to investigate carefully before we adopt a policy in our foreign representation designed in part after that of other countries. Certainly this country has not heretofore found it desirable to follow the practice of other leading nations in the organization and administration of our Consular and Diplomatic Service. The writer's conviction, after a period of five years in the foreign service, is that it would be immensely more advantageous to follow other great countries a little more closely in this matter, rather than to adopt a policy which is itself a recent innovation on the part of other countries. It has often been shown that for many years past Great Britain, Germany, France, and others have paid much larger salaries to their foreign representatives and furnished larger expense allowances than does the United States. Several of the leading trading nations have for many years given pensions to retired consular and diplomatic officers, thereby developing an esprit de corps not discernable in the American foreign service, although this spirit is as desirable there as in the Army and Navy.

The appointment of commercial attachés subordinated to the Department of Commerce will at once involve a conflict of authority between that department and the Department of State in some of the

most important matters affecting the activities of our foreign representatives. It is proposed to designate such officials at 14 of the more important capitals, where they are to confine their activities strictly to the advancement of our foreign trade interests. The posts to which such attachés will be assigned are precisely those now occupied by consular officers of the largest experience and greatest usefulness in this particular sphere, which in most cases describes the consul's most important functions.

Furthermore, the training and experience which consuls almost invariably acquire in the smaller posts in which they serve prior to occupying those of the higher grade, in countries to which it is proposed to designate commercial attachés, have prepared them preeminently for efficient service in the advancement of this country's foreign trade interests. So perfectly self-evident is this fact that the Department of Commerce has itself proposed that wherever possible experienced and efficient consular officers be designated as commercial attachés, after first resigning from the Consular Service. It has even been seriously proposed by the present Secretary of the Department of Commerce that supervision of consular officers in all that pertains to commercial affairs be given to the Department of Commerce instead of to the Department of State. I feel competent to suggest that the Department of Commerce already has all the share in directing the work of consular officers that is good either for that department or for the foreign service. The Bureau of Manufactures has for many years outlined subjects on which it wished the State Department to call for reports from consuls. The work that has been done in this way is conceded generally to be more comprehensive and valuable than any similar work by the consular officers of any other country. The sore spot has been in the fact that the State Department quite properly insisted upon censoring these and all other reports before permitting the Department of Commerce to publish them. Confidential reports intended for restricted use have always been freely passed on by the State Department for judicious distribution by the Bureau of Manufactures.

It must be borne in mind that no matter to whom our foreign representatives are instructed to report, the State Department must and will be held accountable by foreign countries for their expressions of opinion. By far the greatest number of occasions on which it is possible that a foreign representative may in some inadvertent way offend the country to which he is accredited and when the greatest delicacy must be exercised, have to do, directly or indirectly, with commercial affairs. To give the Department of Commerce supervision of officers abroad acting in such matters would mean not only a loss of prestige for our foreign service but it would mean that the invaluable records and precedents known intimately only in the State Department, would be unavailable at times when most needed. It would mean that the State Department would be held accountable for many things which it could in no wise control and would eventually involve this country in unpleasant diplomatic controversies.

The writer does not hold a brief for the State Department. Frankly speaking, the weakest point in our foreign service to-day is in the faulty and somewhat archaic administrative methods of the Consular and Diplomatic Services. The man who has for many years been at



the head of our Consular Service—and this is said without the slightest idea as to his political faith—is without doubt the foremost authority in the world on the organization and efficient administration of a Consular Service. Much that has been done and is being done has been accomplished by this man single handed and in the face of many handicaps. The past administration did not support him properly because available appropriations were too largely diverted to the use of a faddist on “dollar diplomacy,” who utilized them in extending what he deemed the proper sphere of the diplomatic branch at the expense of the Consular Service. The present administration has done well to carry on and further promote the previously established merit system of appointments and promotions, but it has placed a further handicap upon the already weak administrative end of the organization by replacing some highly practical men, such as Charles M. Pepper, with appointees who know nothing of the conditions under which consular officers labor and much less of their responsibilities. Ability to manage a school for stenographers indicates nothing at all of efficiency in properly directing consular officers in foreign trade extension.

An appropriation of \$15,000 per annum additional for the express purpose of enlarging and perfecting the consular administrative staff by the appointment of three or four experts with several years of foreign experience would serve to greatly increase the efficiency of the whole service. An appropriation of an additional amount of \$150,000, to be expended in increased clerk hire and contingent expense funds, would serve to double the efficiency of the Consular Service. Congress, as well as the public, should bear in mind that this amount would represent practically the only cost to this country of our Consular Service. At the present time, the annual appropriations for the Consular Service are about equal to the aggregate amount of fees turned in to the Treasury Department by the consular offices.

The bill under discussion proposes an expenditure of \$75,000 for salaries of attachés and clerks in 14 different posts. Traveling and office expenses and incidentals would certainly bring the total expenditure up to not less than \$150,000 per annum. Aside from the general undesirability of this policy, it must be noted that the salaries provided are wholly insufficient to secure the kind of representatives who could reasonably be expected to accomplish the results hoped for. The present consul general at Rio de Janeiro, for example, has come to realize that his salary of \$8,000 per annum is wholly inadequate to meet proper living expenses, owing to the extraordinary high cost of living. A similar condition exists in many other capitals where attachés would be sent. Yet the fact remains that the expenditure of \$5,500 (minimum) for salaries, with a further expense of not less than \$2,500 for traveling and incidentals, or \$8,000 in all, is fully three times as much as is necessary to obtain the same results. An expenditure of \$3,000 additional by the consulate general at Rio de Janeiro would practically double the efficiency of the consul general, with an experience in the service covering 20 years, and of the vice consul general, with an experience of 5 or 6 years abroad. The same is true to even a more striking degree of the consulate general at Buenos Aires. The present consul general at that post has had an experience covering 20 or more years of service in the diplomatic

and consular field in various parts of the world. Yet owing to lack of clerical assistance and funds for necessary current expenses, his efficiency in the broader and more important work of his office is greatly curtailed by reason of the obligations imposed upon him for doing purely routine work. A similar situation exists at many far eastern posts, in a field where the latent possibilities for our trade expansion are unlimited. Scores of highly efficient and well trained consular officers there are so restricted in their activities by reason of insufficient help that an additional clerk at from \$1,500 to \$2,000 would double the efficiency of the whole staff in trade extension.

Lest this seem an exaggerated statement, it may be permissible to cite a personal experience. During a period of four years' service at an important post in a country then and now largely made the object of American trade extension the writer was the only subordinate to the consul general, who was and is one of the most efficient and indefatigable officers in the service. The writer's time was almost wholly occupied with the routine of the office, invoices, correspondence, seamen, business-men callers, etc., thus relieving the consul general, as far as possible, from the necessity of doing routine work. Except for perhaps one day each week given to correspondence and a part of each day in personal interviews with American business men who called, his time was almost wholly occupied with reports dealing with every conceivable phase of commerce in his district; and of that time, fully two-thirds was spent in doing his own typewriting, the other third being given to the compilation and arrangement of his information. With the consul general on leave, his subordinate did his customary work and as much of the necessary commercial work as his spare time would permit. With the subordinate on leave, the consul general did the routine work perforce and whatever of his other duties that his time and strength made possible.

It is needless to point out that with a competent stenographer, at \$2,000 per annum, the efficiency of this \$8,000 officer would not have been doubled, but practically trebled.

If the present Congress desires sincerely to perform a real service for those in foreign-trade extension, it will give serious consideration to the following requisites to securing a wholly efficient Consular Service:

1. A greatly strengthened administrative organization.
2. Larger appropriations for the maintenance of consular offices.
3. The establishment of the Consular Service upon a more permanent and efficient basis by adopting a long existing practice in other great trading nations; that is, the designation of officers to grades in the service, to which grades the respective salaries will appertain regardless of the post to which the officer may be assigned. Legislation should be so framed as to make this applicable to the subordinate service as well as to consuls and consuls general.

Finally, Congress would do well to give support to the practice of the Department of Commerce in sending commercial agents abroad, particularly when such agents are experts in some particular line. The writer is confident that the manufacturers of this country will support him in the conviction that where such agents have been experts in the field they have tried to cover, their reports have been invaluable. The same can not be said of reports made by many other

commercial agents. Reports of investigations made by W. A. Graham Clark, a practical cotton manufacturer and technical engineer, have not only received wide publicity in this country but have been quoted as highly authoritative statements in all the great cotton manufacturing centers of the world. Results can be obtained by such technically trained men in cooperation with consular officers which can not be obtained by the average consul alone. The Department of Commerce would do well to concentrate its efforts along that line, rather than upon the appointment of attachés, who will simply duplicate the work, which can be better performed by the existing consular organization, if the latter be given the proper support.

J. J. SLECHTA.



1. The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the study of the history of the United States. It is argued that the study of the history of the United States is essential for a full understanding of the country and its people. The paper then discusses the various methods used by historians to study the past, including the use of primary and secondary sources, and the importance of critical thinking in the study of history.

2. The second part of the paper discusses the role of the United States in the world. It is argued that the United States has played a significant role in the world since the end of the Second World War, and that this role has been shaped by a number of factors, including the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and the rise of the Soviet Union. The paper then discusses the various ways in which the United States has influenced the world, including through its economic power, its military power, and its cultural influence.

3. The third part of the paper discusses the future of the United States. It is argued that the United States faces a number of challenges in the future, including the rise of China, the decline of the American middle class, and the increasing polarization of the country. The paper then discusses the various ways in which the United States can meet these challenges, including through economic reform, military reform, and political reform.